

HEALTH

What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (OS-tee-oh-are-THRY-tis) (OA), or degenerative joint disease, is one of the oldest and most common types of arthritis. It is characterized by the breakdown of the joint's cartilage. Cartilage is the part of the joint that cushions the ends of bones. Cartilage breakdown causes bones to rub against each other, causing pain and loss of movement. Commonly affecting middle-aged and older people, OA can range from very mild to very severe. It affects hands and weight-bearing joints such as knees, hips, feet and back.

Osteoarthritis affects an estimated 20.7 million Americans, mostly after age 45. Women are more commonly affected than men. Musculoskeletal conditions such as OA cost the U.S. economy nearly \$65 billion per year in direct expenses and lost wages and production.

What causes osteoarthritis?

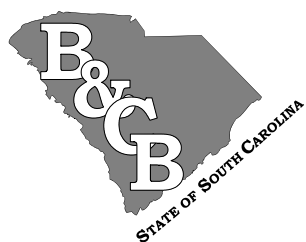
There are many factors that can cause OA. Although age is a risk factor, research has shown that OA is not an inevitable part of aging. Obesity may lead to osteoarthritis of the knees. In addition, people with joint injuries due to sports, work-related activity or accidents may be at increased risk of developing OA.

Treatment Options

Treatment options focus on decreasing pain and improving joint movement and may include the following:

- Exercises to keep joints flexible and improve muscle strength
- Many different medications used are to control pain including corticosteroids and NSAIDs. Glucocorticoids injected into joints that are inflamed and not responsive to NSAIDs. For mild pain without inflammation, acetaminophen may be used.
- Heat/cold therapy for temporary pain relief
- Joint protection to prevent strain or stress on painful joints
- Surgery (sometimes) to relieve chronic pain in damaged joints
- Weight control to prevent extra stress on weight-bearing joints

For more information about osteoarthritis or other types of arthritis contact the Arthritis Foundation – Carolinas Chapter at (704) 529-5166 or visit www.aanma.org.



STATE HEALTH PLAN PREVENTION PARTNERS
South Carolina Budget and Control Board
Employee Insurance Program
April 2002

